

The buzz word lately seems to be "Change." I have to confess my beliefs on the death penalty have gone through some changes. I used to be all for it, as some of you are.....until I took a serious look into all facets of it. Things change....and so did I.

You have all heard the arguments.

First, for all my fiscal conservative friends, the legal costs of a death penalty case means they are much more expensive than life without parole.

Second, you know the courts don't always treat everyone equally.

Third, it's not really a deterrent....We have only executed 3 people in the last 30 years. How could that be a deterrent?

But those reasons alone would not have changed my mind about the death penalty. I think I would have remained in favor of the death penalty. However, when I faced the issue of making mistakes, and being consistent in my support for life, I was challenged to change my mind.

Most of you know I am pro life and I feel life is precious from the womb to a natural death. It is that belief that really made me question the use of capital punishment. My wife views the world in more black and white terms than I do. She said to me one day "Abortion is the taking of an innocent life.

Capital punishment is the taking of a guilty life" That pretty simple, concise and makes a lot of sense...but is it always a guilty life.....is it always a guilty life???? I guess if that statement were true then I would not be standing here today.

I want to tell you a quick story about how this issue really hit home for me. Last session when this same bill came up I was doing some research and googled the death penalty for information. To my surprise I found the following quote. "After spending 15 years in a New York prison for murder, Roy Brown has been exonerated through DNA evidence and is now free. Brown is the eighth person in New York in the last 13 months to be exonerated." The personalization of this news article really set me back in my chair..... Yes mistakes do happen.

Of course there are many examples of heinous animals that certainly deserve to be killed. But, as long as the death penalty remains, mistakes involving the innocent will happen.

Now just so you do not think I have gone completely soft on these heinous criminals, I say lock them up and throw away the key for life without any possibility of parole. No TV, computers, amenities of any kind and they should all have constant electronic monitoring. Frankly death is the easy way out for many of these monsters and in fact the last man executed in Montana asked to stop the appeals and proceed with the execution since life in prison was a worse punishment for him. Yes the State has an obligation to make sure the public is protected and that is exactly what life without any possibility of parole does. Mr. Chair and members of the committee I contend this will be one of the most difficult decisions of this session.

It might be easier to allow the death penalty to continue....

If it were less expensive than life in prison

If the courts treated rich and poor equally

If it truly was a deterrent

If everyone that was executed was guilty

Unfortunately the sad truth about the death penalty is

It is much more expensive

The courts do not dispense justice equally

It is not a deterrent

And sometimes.....yes, sometimes they are innocent

Members of the committee, I told you at the beginning how my philosophy about life challenged me to come to this decision. So I challenge you today. If you push that green button today you are saying even

a guilty life is worth saving. How contradictory is it that a pro life person can be for the death penalty. Likewise how contradictory is it for a person that is against the death penalty to be pro abortion. Those innocent lives in the womb are in much greater danger than any one on death row.

I will end with a paraphrase of a quote from Ronald Reagan about life. He said "life issues are complicated and I cannot say for sure if I am right but if I have to pick a side I will always choose life over death."

Members of the committee, I ask my friends from both sides of the aisle as we did two years ago to join me in choosing life without the possibility of parole.

Senator Roy Brown